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**From:** Michelle Bassin < >  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 30, 2016 6:23 PM  
**To:** DOT Environmental Planning  
**Subject:** Rehabilitation Study Report (Bridge No. 01349)

Dear Mr. Alexander:

We are writing in response to the public meeting that was held on June 15, 2016 at Westport Town Hall, at which the Connecticut Department of Transportation presented its “Rehabilitation Study Report” (RSR) regarding Bridge No. 01349. During the public comments portion of the evening (which lasted in excess of two hours), numerous state and local public officials and Westport citizens spoke; virtually all of them were strongly opposed to both of the options advocated by the DOT (major rehabilitation or complete replacement).

#### Safety

As was pointed out at the June 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, the RSR’s discussion of the bridge’s alleged safety problems is inaccurate and misleading in the extreme. Over a 5-year period, DOT can point to only 16 accidents that occurred on the bridge, only two of which had anything to do with the dimensions of the bridge. Given the DOT’s own estimate of approximately 13,000 vehicles crossing the bridge per day, that is two accidents for 23,750,000 crossings. This confirms the point made by the mass of speakers at the meeting: the bridge in its current dimensions is actually a deterrent to accidents.

Perhaps more to the point, the proposals to undertake major rehabilitation or full replacement of the bridge each would open the surrounding community up to significantly increased spillover traffic volume from I-95, including much larger, 18-wheel trucks. Any supposed traffic flow improvements that might otherwise have been expected from expanding the bridge would thus inevitably be undone.

At the same time, the surrounding neighborhoods (Bridge Street, Greens Farms Road, Compo Road, Imperial Avenue) would experience a devastating change. These are true family neighborhoods with many school-aged and younger children, and numerous elementary, middle school and high school bus-stops. An absolutely crucial function that the bridge has always served is one of traffic “calming”. Drivers understand that it is necessary to slow down to cross the bridge and do so – hence the incredibly low incidence of accidents on the bridge. An obvious consequence of the changes DOT is advocating will be not only increased traffic volume on the bridge, but increased speeds. It would only be a matter of time until we had our first fatality – if not fatalities.

Let us also be clear about another point: there appears to be an effort on the part of DOT to manufacture additional “stakeholders” for the purpose of justifying its decision. Bicyclists are not meaningful stakeholders in this matter. There are plenty of places to ride bikes in Westport, and bicyclists can agitate for even more bike paths if they like. Pleasure boaters are not meaningful stakeholders either. Recreational pursuits should hold no weight in a matter that so vitally impacts the health and well-being of the people who *live* in the neighborhoods surrounding the bridge and the community at large.

#### Preservation

The bridge is on the National Register of Historic Places. It was built in 1884 and is the last movable iron bridge in the United States. Over the past 130 years the residents of Westport have on multiple occasions banded together to preserve this part of our community's heritage and resist attempts by the State of Connecticut to do away with it.

Indeed, this is more than just a matter of esthetics: landmarks like this bridge make Westport the unique place that it is. And, as State Senator Toni Boucher pointed out at the June 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, Westport serves to prop up the economy of Connecticut as a whole (even more so in these economically trying times when a certain large corporation has just left for Massachusetts). We need a broader set of values, principles and priorities applied here than those in the RSR.

#### Social Equity / Pressing Needs Elsewhere

Somehow, this ill-considered project has ballooned from a proposed "spot painting" in May 2015 to the ridiculously expanded scope that is now being "studied". Is there some unstated agenda that the DOT is pursuing? Are FOIA requests in order to determine what has been going on behind the scenes, which companies stand to secure the lucrative contracts that will result from this boondoggle and so forth? Or is this whole enterprise merely the inertial force that has arisen from the availability of federal funds?

Regardless, it borders on fiscal malfeasance to suggest spending between \$19,800,000 - \$35,800,000 of federal and state tax dollars on a bridge in Westport that the DOT acknowledges is safe and not in any way structurally deficient – particularly when there are doubtless so many other more pressing infrastructure problems in the rest of the state. (And we know that if either of the two options is chosen, the final bill will ultimately be multiples higher.) One wonders what the people of, say, Bridgeport or East Hartford would think of this prioritization of Connecticut's all-too-finite budgetary resources. (Not to mention the media. Or CAFCA.)

Whatever minor, truly essential repairs need to be made should of course be made, but the bridge should be preserved in its current dimensions – not enlarged, raised, moved or replaced.

Sincerely,

Clayton Hughes

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Gabriel Shenhar

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